

A call to action

Autoworkers must take contract fight into their own hands!

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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With a little more than three months before the mid-September contract expiration at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, autoworkers are heading into a battle that has great significance for the whole working class.

Ten years ago, the huge concessions handed over by the United Auto Workers union during Obama's bailout of GM and Chrysler set a precedent for a massive assault on all workers. Two-tier wages, temporary part-time employment and economic insecurity have become the new normal for every worker.

In the decade since the 2008 crash, the stock market has more than quadrupled, the automakers and other corporations have made record profits and all the income gains have gone to the richest 1 percent. Today, three billionaires control more wealth than the bottom half of the US population.

But this is not enough. President Trump wants the stock market to rise another 10,000 points. To pump out the necessary profits to accomplish this, workers would have to be reduced to industrial slaves. This is precisely what the ruling class intends to do.

The attack on autoworkers in the US is part of a global restructuring of the auto industry, which includes the proposed merger of FCA and Renault-Nissan. In response to mounting signs of a new recession, Ford, GM, VW and the other global automakers are closing factories around the world, pitting workers against each other in a race to the bottom.

The auto bosses plan to use the threat of unemployment to blackmail workers into accepting more concessions this summer. Their aim is to further transform autoworkers into a cheap, highly exploited and disposable workforce in order to maximize the returns to their wealthy shareholders.

But autoworkers are determined to reverse the endless string of UAW-backed concessions, which have resulted in a 25 percent decline in real wages since 2002. They want substantial raises and to restore the eight-hour day, abolish the two-tier wage system and convert temporary part-time and third-party contract workers into full-time employees.

All over the world, workers are saying "Enough is enough!" Teachers are striking across the United States, Poland, Argentina, Iran and elsewhere; in France, "yellow vest" protesters are fighting inequality; and there are revolutionary upheavals in Algeria, Sudan and other countries. After years of being told by the UAW that Mexican workers are our enemies, tens of thousands of auto parts

workers in the *maquiladora* sweatshops just across the border in Matamoros, Mexico waged a courageous strike earlier this year against poverty wages.

For rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the UAW!

Every worker knows the UAW will bring back another rotten contract just like in 2015 and before. In fact, the contract has already been written. Company and union officials are not heading into "negotiations," but strategy sessions where they will discuss how best to ram through another pro-company deal.

The criminal conviction of former UAW vice president Norwood Jewell and the corruption scandal engulfing the entire UAW proves what autoworkers have long known: The UAW is a bribed tool of corporate management and the contracts they signed should have been declared null and void.

A fightback is possible, but workers will need their own organizations. The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers in every factory to organize *rank-and-file factory committees* to organize opposition. The first step is for workers to draw up a list of demands for the contract fight that is based on what we and our families need, not what the corporations and the UAW say is affordable.

These should include:

- No plant closings and no concessions!
- Abolish all tiers!
 - A 40 percent wage increase to compensate for the increased cost of living!
- Convert all part-timers to full-timers!
- For workers' control of line speed and safety!

Rank-and-file committees must demand the right to oversee all contract negotiations. No more secret discussions with bogus "highlights" presented at the last minute for a vote! Workers committees must control the balloting to ensure that the vote is free and fair.

To fight for these demands it is necessary to build up a network of rank-and-file organizations in the factories, which will unite all

autoworkers—first- and second-tier, full-time and part-time, young, old and retired—and mobilize our collective power. Lines of communications between all factories, and between GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers, must be established in order to prepare a *national strike* to shut down the auto industry.

A political program for autoworkers

Workers are not just fighting this or that greedy employer but the entire capitalist system, which is based on the exploitation of billions of workers around the world for the enrichment of the corporate and financial elite. Workers are also fighting the Democrats and Republicans, which both do the bidding of the capitalist owners.

The fight by autoworkers takes place as the ruling class is moving sharply to the right all across the world. The Trump administration is promoting far-right and anti-immigrant forces. The Democrats have not opposed Trump for trampling on the rights of immigrants and workers, let alone his ceaseless warmongering. Instead they have promoted the bogus claim that the president is a puppet of Russia and called for a crackdown on “foreign interference” in America.

The ruling class is terrified of the growth of the class struggle and the growing interest in socialism. This is what underlies the turn to authoritarian forms of rule and the preparations for new wars by both big business parties. The persecution by Trump and the Democrats of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning for exposing US war crimes is aimed at silencing all opposition to war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights.

This is, above all, aimed at the working class. Any attempt by autoworkers to fight for their interests will be seen by Trump and the Democrats as a threat to “national security” that should be answered with state repression.

This is why we need a new political strategy based on the following principles.

For the international unity of the working class!

When the Matamoros, Mexico workers revolted their strike led to a shortage of steering wheels and other parts, leading to a slowdown of production at US and Canadian plants. This shows that workers, if we are united internationally, have the power to shut down the international production and supply chain.

Every effort by Trump, the Democrats and the UAW to divide workers must be rejected. Instead US, Mexican and Canadian workers must unite to defend the rights of all workers for secure and good-paying jobs.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans!

Trump has handed billions of dollars in tax cuts to the corporations, witch-hunted immigrants, launched a trade war that could bring down the world economy and its threatening to wage war for oil against Iran, Venezuela and other countries.

Obama bailed out Wall Street, slashed the jobs and wages of autoworkers and oversaw the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history. Both the Democrats and Republicans are controlled by big business. To defend our class interests, workers must build a powerful movement to take political power in our own hands.

Socialism is the only alternative to inequality, war and dictatorship

The rich need the working class to exploit, but the working class does not need them. It is the workers, not the corporate executives and Wall Street bankers, who build the cars, drive the trucks, teach the children, program the machines and computers and produce society’s wealth.

If the social rights of the majority are to take priority over the selfish interests of the rich, then the giant industries, banks and private fortunes of the super-rich, must become the common property of the working class. The auto industry must be transformed into a public utility, collectively owned and democratically controlled by workers, and integrated into a socialist planned economy in the US and internationally based on production for human need, not private profit.

United, the working class in the US and around the world is far more powerful than the corporations. There is enormous support for a struggle and we must take action ourselves. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will do everything to assist workers in building rank-and-file committees and to link up the struggle of autoworkers with other sections of workers in the US and internationally. Contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* today to join this fight.



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